

The David Wilmot Birthplace
Bethany, Wayne County, Pennsylvania.

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DAVID WILMOT BIRTHPLACE
Bethany, Wayne County, Pennsylvania.

The David Wilmot Birthplace, now known as the Sutton Place, is located in the Borough of Bethany, which was formerly the county seat of Wayne County, but more than eighty years ago, all that local glory passed to Honesdale three miles to the south.

Wilmot came of stock originally British, but (on both sides of the family) of long transplantation to American soil. For five generations, the Wilmots had lived in Connecticut, but David's father, Randall, apparently, felt something of the westward urge, for he moved into Sullivan County, and must have moved on again, very soon; for, when David was born, January 20, 1814, they were living in the newly founded county seat of Wayne County-----the little town of Bethany.

It is not definitely known exactly under what roof David was born. His father bought and sold various pieces of property in Bethany, one as early as 1814. It is generally and locally attributed, however, to the Sutton Place. Certainly, it was not the mansion to which some persons, locally, attribute the honor, for Randall Wilmot did not buy the lot on which that house stands until 1827, when David was thirteen years old, and he built the residence (and a store, since removed) between 1827 and 1832. The mansion was David's boyhood home, but not his cradle.

The problem of schooling was not as difficult as might have been expected; and the early schooling of David was looked after very energetically. The primitive system of schooling had been superseded by the founding of Beech Woods Academy in 1813, but it was not completed nor ready for service until 1820, just in time for David's first lessons. The education received here was extended at Cayuga Lake Academy, Aurora, New York. At eighteen, David left school, and in 1832, he entered the law office of George W. Woodward, at Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

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A part of young Wilmot's experience in the Wilkes-Barre law office is thus described: "Authorities had been placed in his hands for him to read and study. But, he seemed to read very little, and was apparently listless. He dressed without taste and his appearance was very careless." He was admitted to the bar in August, 1834. In September, 1834, scarcely a month after his admission in Wilkes-Barre, he was admitted to practise in the several courts of Bradford County, Pennsylvania, and proceeded to hang out his shingle in the little town of Towanda.

Early in 1841, he had his first taste of public office, when his associate in the political leadership of the county, Victor E. Piollet, made him his assistant in the superintendency of the Tioga line of the North Branch Canal. The closing months of 1841 found him actively interested in all the political activities of his county.

In February, 1842, Wilmot was urged to seek the nomination to Congress. In September, 1844, the nomination was made, and it opened the prologue to a shift in the drama of David Wilmot's life---a shift, which was to lift him from local to national prominence, and establish him as a permanent figure in the history of the United States.

Wilmot did not become really famous until the years 1845-1865 when, he was noted as a lawyer, a statesman, a member of Congress and a national figure, because of the Proviso, which caused such bitter debate. It was during a recess period of the House, during the discussion of the two million bill that Wilmot, in his Albany address, (delivered a few months afterward) stated, that he conceived and declared the purpose of moving "an amendment to the effect that slavery should be excluded from any territory acquired by virtue of such an appropriation." Mr. Wilmot gave his views on the President's request which was for \$2,000,000.00 and concluded by offering the amendment, which afterwards, became world famous as the "Wilmot Proviso", in the following words: "Provided, That as an express and fundamental condition to the acquisition of any territory from the Republic of Mexico, by the United States, by virtue of any treaty which may be negotiated between them, and to the use by the Executive of the moneys herein appropriated, neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever exist in any part of said territory, except for crime, whereof the party shall first be duly convicted."

Until 1924, when a great book was written about David Wilmot, himself, little was generally known of the great advocate of the Wilmot Proviso-----of the part he took in organizing the Smithsonian Institute, and supporting the establishment of the subtreasury system; of his lone stand in the Pennsylvania delegation in favor of the low tariff of 1846 and his early advocacy of a direct tax; of his rally of his state for Van Buren and free soil in 1848; of his leadership in organizing the Republican party there; his authorship of the first Republican national platform in 1856 and his near approach to the vice-presidency with Fremont; of his sacrifice campaign for the governorship of Pennsylvania in 1857 to cement and perpetuate the new Republican movement; of his powerful influence in securing the nomination of Lincoln in 1860; of his invitation to enter Lincoln's Cabinet in 1861; of his service in the Senate from 1861 to 1863 or his distinguished record as Judge in the first United States Court of Claims, from 1863 to 1868.

There was scarcely an important event in the development of American history, during the critical period from 1845 to 1865, into which Wilmot's personality and influence did not enter in important measure.

The David Wilmot home was bought in 1869 by Mortimore Edward Lavo. He was a soldier in the Civil War, and died only four years ago, at the age of ninety-four. He lived there for sixty-seven years, and when he died, he willed the old home to his daughter, Mrs. Augusta Lavo Sutton, who now occupies it with her two children. The house was built in 1814, by John Gustin.

There have been very few changes made in the general appearance of the house, except, that in 1904, Mr. Lavo placed a cornice on the roof of the house. It has stone foundations, a gabled roof, and is covered with wood siding. The main part of the building is two and one-half stories high, and the wing, one and one-half stories. The architecture is Colonial.

There is a fairly large hall, on the first floor, with the parlor leading off to the right, with what is now used as the kitchen, beyond this. This kitchen was originally the dining room. There is a small storage room and a pantry leading from the kitchen. On the left of the hall is

the living room, and leading from the living room is a small bedroom, and a storage room. There is a Colonial stairway, leading to the second floor, where there are five bedrooms. One of these bedrooms is situated in the wing of the house, and can be reached only from the first floor.

The kitchen was formerly in the basement, where the round brick bake oven is still to be seen, beside the fireplace which is now closed. Only a portion of the mantel is seen. There are several of the small, original cupboards with their wooden latches. One of these is under the stairs, and one beside the fireplace. Beyond the basement kitchen is the large fruit closet, and a pantry. These rooms are paved with the original flag stones. The beams, as seen in the basement kitchen, are 1 foot thick and are hand hewn. A post support is nine inches in diameter. There is another cellar on the left side of the house, which has been closed.

There are four fireplaces; one in the basement kitchen, one in the original dining room, one in the parlor, and one in the front bedroom, but these have been closed. There is also a mantel in the sitting room. The largest of these fireplaces is in the dining room. All of the mantels are very plain; the one in the parlor has Ionic pilasters. All of the woodwork is original. There are chair rails in all but one room of the house. There are many windows, all with small lights. Floors are original, ash.

There were originally two entrances at the front of the house, one on either side, but one has been removed, and the remaining one is a typical Colonial entrance of good design.

This home is, as far as it is possible to ascertain, one of the most historically important in this vicinity.

Historic Material obtained from: Mrs. Augusta Lavo Sutton.
"David Wilmot, Free Soiler" by Charles Buxton Going. Preface,
Page 17, 18. Also, Pages 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 29, 36, 96, 98.

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